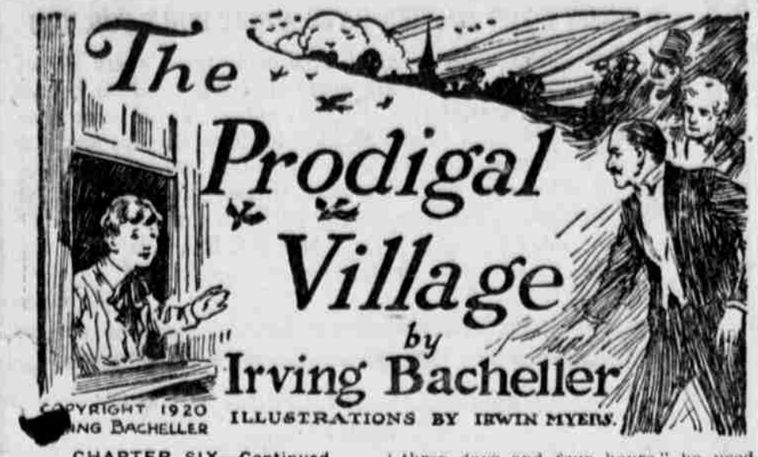

CHAPTER SIX—Continued.

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Hiram sat dozing in a corner of the bar-room of the Eagle hotel that day. He had been ashamed to go to his comfortable room over the garage. He did not feel entitled to the hospitality of Mr. Singleton. Somehow, he couldn't bear the thought of going there. His new clothes and silk hat were in a state which excited the derision of small boys and audible comment from all observers while he had been making his way down the street. His money was about gone. The barkeeper had refused to sell him any more drink. In the early dusk he went out of doors. It was almost as warm as midsummer and the sky was clear. He called at the door of the Widow Moran for his dog. In a moment Christmas came down from the Shepherd's room and greeted his master with fond affection. The two went away together. They walked up a deserted street and around to the old graveyard. When it was quite dark, they groped their way through the weedy, briered aisles, between moss-covered toppling stones, to their old nook under the ash tree. There Hiram made a bed of boughs, picked from the evergreens that grew in the graveyard, and lay down upon it under his overcoat with the dog Christmas. He found it impossible to sleep, however. When he closed his eyes a new thought began nudging him.

It seemed to be saying, "What are you going to do now, Mr. Hiram Blenkinsop?"

He was pleased that it seemed to say Mr. Hiram Blenkinsop. He lay for a long time looking up at the starry moonlit sky, and at the marble, weather-spotted angel on the monument of the Reverend Thaddeus Sneed, who had been lying there, among the rude forefathers of the village, since 1806. Suddenly the angel began to move. Mr. Blenkinsop observed with alarm that it had discovered him and that its right forefinger was no longer directed toward the sky but was pointing at his face. The angel had assumed the look and voice of his Old Self and was saying:

"I don't see why angels are always cut in marble an' set up in graveyards with nothing to do but point at the sky. It's a cold an' lonesome business. Why don't you give me a job?"

His Old Self vanished and, as it did so, the spotted angel fell to coughing and sneezing. It coughed and sneezed so loudly that the sound went echoing in the distant sky and so violently that it reeled and seemed to be in danger of falling. Mr. Blenkinsop awoke with a rude jump so that the dog Christmas barked in alarm. It was nothing but the midnight train from the south pulling out of the station, which was near the old graveyard. The spotted angel stood firmly in place and was pointing at the sky as usual.

It was probably an hour or so later, when Mr. Blenkinsop was awakened by the barking of the dog Christmas. He quieted the dog and listened. He heard a sound like that of a baby crying. It awoke tender memories in the mind of Hiram Blenkinsop. One very sweet recollection was about all that the barren, bitter years of his young manhood had given him worth having. It was the recollection of a little child which had come to his home in the first year of his married life.

Hiram Sat Dozing in a Corner of the Bar-Room of the Eagle Hotel That Day.

"She lived eighteen months and three days and four hours," he used to say, in speaking of her, with a tender note in his voice.

Almost twenty years she had been lying in the old graveyard near the ash tree. Since then the voice of a child crying always halted his steps. It is probable that, in her short life, the neglected, pathetic child Pearl—that having been her name—had protested much against a plentiful lack of comfort and sympathy.

So Mr. Blenkinsop's agitation at the sound of a baby crying somewhere near him, in the darkness of the old graveyard, was quite natural and will be readily understood. He rose on his elbow and listened. Again he heard the small, appealing voice.

"By thunder! Christmas," he whispered. "If that ain't like Pearl when she was a little, teeny, weeny thing no bigger'n a pint o' beer! Say, it is, sir, sure as sin!"

He scrambled to his feet, suddenly, for now, also, he could hear the voice of a woman crying. He groped his way in the direction from which the sound came and soon discovered the woman. She was kneeling on a grave with a child in her arms. Her grief touched the heart of the man.

"Who be you?" he asked.

"I'm cold, and my baby is sick, and I have no friends," she sobbed.

"Yes, ye have!" said Hiram Blenkinsop. "I don't care who ye be, I'm yer friend and don't ye forgit it."

There was a reassuring note in the voice of Hiram Blenkinsop. Its gentleness had in it a quiver of sympathy. She felt it and gave to him—an unknown, invisible man, with just a quiver of sympathy in his voice—her confidence.

If ever one was in need of sympathy, she was at that moment. She felt that she must speak out to some one. So keenly she felt the impulse that she had been speaking to the stars and the cold gravestones. Here at last was a human being with a quiver of sympathy in his voice.

"I thought I would come home, but when I got here I was afraid," the girl moaned. "I wish I could die."

"No, ye don't, either!" said Hiram Blenkinsop, "Sometimes, I've thought that I hadn't no friends an' wanted to die, but I was just foolin' myself. To be sure, I ain't had no baby on my hands but I've had somethin' just as worrisome, I guess. Folks like you an' me has got friends a-plenty if we'll only give 'em a chance. I've found that out. You let me take that baby an' come with me. I know where you'll git the glad hand. You just come right along with me."

The unmistakable note of sincerity was in the voice of Hiram Blenkinsop. She gave the baby into his arms. He held it to his breast a moment, thinking of old times. Then he swung his arms like a cradle saying:

"You stop your hollerin'—ye gol'darn little skeezucks! It ain't decent to go on that way in a graveyard an' ye ought to know it. Be ye tryin' to wake up the dead?"

The baby grew quiet and finally fell asleep.

"Come on, now," said Hiram, with the baby lying against his breast. "You an' me are goin' out o' the past. I know a little house that's next door to heaven. They say ye can see heaven from its winders. It's where the good Shepherd lives. Christmas an' I know the place—don't we, ol' boy? Come right along. There ain't no kind o' doubt o' what they'll say to us."

The young woman followed him out of the old graveyard and through the dark, deserted streets until they came to the cottage of the Widow Moran. They passed through the gate into Judge Crooker's garden. Under the Shepherd's window, Hiram Blenkinsop gave the baby to its mother and with his hands to his mouth called "Bob!" in a loud whisper. Suddenly a robin sounded his alarm. Instantly, the Shepherd's room was full of light. In a moment, he was at the window sweeping the garden paths and the tree tops with his searchlight. It fell on the sorrowful figure of the young mother with the child in her arms and stopped. She stood looking up at the window bathed in the flood of light. It reminded the Shepherd of that glow which the wise men saw in the manger at Bethlehem.

"Pauline Baker!" he exclaimed. "Have you come back or am I dreaming? It's you—thanks to the Blessed Virgin! It's you! Come around to the door. My mother will let you in."

It was a warm welcome that the girl received in the little home of the Widow Moran. Many words of comfort and good cheer were spoken in the next hour or so, after which the good woman made tea and toast and broiled a chop and served them in the Shepherd's room.

"God love ye, child! So he was a married man—bad 'cess to him an' the likes o' him!" she said as she came in with the tray. "Mother o' Jesus! What a wicked world it is!"

The prudent dog Christmas, being afraid of babies, hid under the Shepherd's bed, and Hiram Blenkinsop lay down for the rest of the night on the lounge in the cottage kitchen.

An hour after daylight, when the judge was walking in his garden, he wondered why the widow and the Shepherd were sleeping so late.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

In Which High Voltage Develops in the Conversation.

It was a warm, bright May day. There was not a cloud in the sky. Roger Delane had arrived and the Bings were giving a dinner that evening. The best people of Hazelmead were coming over in motorcars. Phyllis and Roger had a long ride together that day on the new Kentucky saddle horses. Mrs. Bing had spent the morning in Hazelmead and had stayed to lunch with Mayor and Mrs. Stacy. She had returned at four and cut some flowers for the table and gone to her room for an hour's rest when the young people returned. She was not yet asleep when Phyllis came into the big bedroom. Mrs. Bing lay among the cushions on her couch. She partly rose, tumbled the cushions into a pile and leaned against them.

"Heavens! I'm tired!" she exclaimed. "These women in Hazelmead hang onto one like a lot of hungry cats. They all want money

"Married! To Whom Are You Married?"

for one thing or another—Red Cross or Liberty bonds or fatherless children or tobacco for the soldiers or books for the library. My word! I'm broke and it seems as if each of my legs hung by a thread."

Phyllis smiled as she stood looking down at her mother.

"How beautiful you look!" the fond mother exclaimed. "If he didn't propose to-day, he's a chump."

"But he did," said Phyllis. "I tried to keep him from it, but he just would propose in spite of me."

The girl's face was red and serious. She sat down in a chair and began to remove her hat. Mrs. Bing rose suddenly, and stood facing Phyllis.

"I thought you loved him," she said with a look of surprise.

"So I do," the girl answered.

"What did you say?"

"I said no."

"What!"

"I refused him!"

"For God's sake, Phyllis! Do you think you can afford to play with a man like that? He won't stand for it."

"Let him sit for it then and, mother, you might as well know, first as last, that I am not playing with him."

There was a calm note of firmness in the voice of the girl. She was prepared for this scene. She had known it was coming. Her mother was hot with irritating astonishment. The calmness of the girl in suddenly beginning to dig a grave for this dear ambition—rich with promise—in the very day when it had come submissively to their feet, stung like the tooth of a serpent. She stood very erect and said with an icy look in her face:

"You young upstart! What do you mean?"

There was a moment of frigid silence in which both of the women began to turn cold. Then Phyllis answered very calmly as she sat looking down at the bunch of violets in her hand:

"It means that I am married, mother."

Mrs. Bing's face turned red. There was a little convulsive movement of the muscles around her mouth. She folded her arms on her breast, lifted her chin a bit higher and asked in a polite tone, although her words fell like fragments of cracked ice:

"Married! To whom are you married?"

"To Gordon King."

Phyllis spoke casually as if he were a piece of ribbon that she had bought at a store.

Mrs. King sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands for half a moment. Suddenly she picked up a slipper that lay at her feet and flung it at the girl.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A legal light naturally feels put out if the judge turns him down.

Endurance is nobler than strength, and patience than beauty.—Ruskin.

Requirements.

"It requires dollars to get into the fast set." "And sense to keep out of it."

The Breath of Their Life.

"Is it true that all theatrical stars crave publicity."

"Have you ever noticed a fish out of water, gasping and flopping about the ground?"

"Of course."

"Well, that fish doesn't yearn for its native element any more than the average theatrical star craves publicity."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

No Discharge in That War.

There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war.—Ecclesiastes VIII, 8.

But Seldom Are.

Cobb—"Does he consider himself a big gun?" Webb—"Yes. Men of small caliber usually do."

The man who carves inscriptions on tombstones is always in hard lines.

Jud Tunkins.

Jud Tunkins says since he looked into a jewelry store window and saw pipes for lady smokers he's about ready to join the anti-tobacco crusade.

Gloomy penitence is only madness turned upside down.—Dr. Johnson.

W. N. U., Salt Lake City, No. 19--1921